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Mary, Woman of Faith – TH 539
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MARIAN DEVOTION IN THE SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME

One can easily take delight in the flower in bloom, smell its aroma and caress its velvet petals; however, it would be a fuller appreciation if one also considered the whole picture of the flower – the part invisible to the eye as well as the part which is a pleasure to behold. We School Sisters of Notre Dame can happily point out that our “New Rule” of 1970 has six explicit references to Mary and numberless implicit ones. We can also claim that our Marian devotion is in obedience to the Vatican II documents of 1963-65 and in anticipation of Pope Paul’s “Marialis Cultus” of 1974. Nevertheless, to speak thus would be to ignore the roots of that devotion – roots found in the Sacred Scriptures as well as in the history of our congregation.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame were founded in 1833, but our seeds were sown already in 1597 in Lorraine by St. Peter Fourier and by Blessed Alix le Clerc. Peter founded a new congregation of women for the education of girls - an education and a training that was so necessary as the foundation of good Christian families. He well knew who was to be the heavenly patroness of so worth while an endeavor:

The Founder recommended to his daughters the greatest tenderness for the Virgin the woman blessed among women, the one laden with divine grace: “They shall not dare do anything, nor say anything, nor undertake anything, nor write anything that may be of any importance whatsoever without having first told her about it and earnestly recommended it to her....They shall take her for counselor and guide in all their actions, and imagine that if they are in her presence, see her and ask her counsel, direction and assistance.”¹

The legal title of his congregation was “Daughters of Our Lady”, and Peter made it quite clear that everything was to be done to the honor of the Virgin of virgins and for the glory of her Divine Son. It was not surprising that on his deathbed in 1640 his last words were “We have a good Lord and a good Lady.”²

The young and beautiful woman who was chosen by God to co-found this new congregation with Fourier was Alix le Clerc. She herself tells us that, in her

¹ Rene Bazin, Take This Child, (Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1948), p. 40

² Sister Dolorita Mast, Man of Lorraine, (Baltimore, Md.: Port City Press, 1966) p 211

teens, “her soul was very sad in the midst of the vanities” and “she had some devotion to Our Lady”³

As she sought to know the Lord’s will for her, her love for Mary deepened and she experienced visions and dreams which involved the Mother of Jesus. “One night she dreamed she saw the Blessed Virgin Our Lady standing at the corner of the altar in church. Alix stood far off, afraid to approach the Holy Mother of God, she herself being so unworthy. But Our Lady beckoned her, saying, ‘Come, my daughter, I shall receive you.’”⁴

Alix then began to turn to the Blessed Virgin in every need, and joined the Sodality of Mary. No doubt her family and friends wondered what was happening to the ‘socialite’ they thought they knew. Her devotion was not without its effect. When she resolved to be part of the new Order and her father opposed her intentions, it was her Mother Mary who confirmed Alix in her desire to follow Jesus in the religious life. The vision is described in this way: “Take this child” – so spoke Our Lady to Alix le Clerc, and as she, the Mother of Divine Wisdom, leaned down to place her Son in the uplifted arms of the young girl, she added, “and make Him grow!”⁵

Alix did take that Child, Jesus, in the person of countless young girls and helped to make Him grow. At another time, Alix tells us,

I was shown a very small narrow path carpeted in green, one end of which began at a chapel dedicated to Our Lady and the other end touched heaven. I wanted to start up this road immediately, but I was told that it was not yet time. Since then, I have always had great devotion in seeking out plans placed under the protection of the Virgin Mary, and great confidence in her assistance. I ask all things of God through His Son and her.⁶

Nevertheless, Alix knew that she, as Superior was only a “Lieutenant”, and “That is why she had inscribed on the base of a statue of the Virgin in the convent chapel the words: ‘You are our Superior.’”⁷ Alix le Clerc went home to her ‘Superior’, her Mother, on January 9, 1622 just five years after the Church officially recognized the Daughters of Our Lady as a Religious Order.

In 1789 the Daughters of Our Lady numbered more than four thousand religious, spread out over ninety convents where young French girls were instructed, for the most part, gratis. The French Revolution did not leave a single one of these houses to survive. The last convent and school to be closed were

³ Bazin, Take This Child, p. 26

⁴ Mast, Man of Lorraine, p. 119

⁵ Bazin, Take This Child, p. 3

⁶ Bazin, Take This Child, p. 40

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 75

located at Stadtamhof in Bavaria; the year was 1809. Bishop Michael Wittmann of nearby Ratisbon admired the work of Fourier's religious women and wished to institute a new religious order with small convents that the parish people could afford to build and to maintain. His choice of foundress was Caroline Gerhardinger, one of the prize pupils of the disbanded Daughters of Our Lady, and the name of the new congregation was the School Sister of Our Lady or of Notre Dame. As could be expected, the new congregation was influenced by the work and spirit of Fourier and his teaching 'nuns'. Both congregations were dedicated to Our Lady, and both were founded for the training of Mary's daughters, to prepare them to imitate Mary, the wife and mother in the home of Joseph at Nazareth.

Bishop Wittmann's friend, Father Francis Sebastian Job, shows us in his Spirit of the Constitutions, written in 1833 just how dear was Our Lady to the new order:

Section I: "Only poor virgins, who love and practice poverty, are true daughters and servants, true clients and imitators of Mary."

Section III: "You are sisters, for you venerate the Blessed Virgin as your mother."

Section IV: "A virgin who can truly say, in the presence of God and His Holy angels: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word,' is another Mary."

Section V: "Daughters of this Most Blessed Virgin, proceeding from your homes on your way to the Temple, conduct yourselves as did Mary, your Mother and you will observe strict enclosure, even outside your convent."⁸

It is also interesting to note that in the Original Rule of 1833, written by Mother Theresa (Caroline Gerhardinger), and modeled on that of St. Peter Fourier, two paragraphs out of the thirteen paragraphs mention Mary:

Paragraph 1: "The Institute is placed under the patronage of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who was chosen as our Mother and Patron and therefore also has taken the name of Notre Dame."

Paragraph 11: "Every day they make meditation, pray the little office of the Blessed Virgin, and assist at Mass whenever circumstances allow it."

⁸ Gregory Thomas Ziegler, A Brief Sketch of the Life of the Reverend Francis Sebastian Job, (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1930), pp. 173-234

Mother Theresa's personal love for Mary is clearly seen in the collection of her prayers, compiled recently by Sister Mary Hester Valentine, SSND. One example is the following:

O holiest Virgin Mary, mother of the Incarnate Word, treasurer of divine grace, refuge and hope of all poor sinners, we turn to you with childlike trust in your maternal love, and beg you to obtain for us the grace always to do the holy will of God. We place our hearts in your hands, O holiest mother, and long to receive from you our own salvation, and that of all who put their hope in you. We confidently hope that you will hear us, as we earnestly pray with deep trust, Hail Mary...

Heavenly Father, through the intercession of the ever Virgin Mary, bless our Congregation, prostrate at your feet, praying to you with all our hearts. Keep us from all harm both within and without, so that we may serve you in peace and tranquility....

October, 1855

The much longer Rule sanctioned in 1924 by the Sacred Congregation of Religious mentions our Lady many times, particularly in Chapter X which is entitled "Veneration of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary" and contains such statements as the following:

- "The Poor School Sisters have chosen the Most Blessed Virgin Mary for their Mother, have placed their life and all their activities under her protection."
- "The Sisters shall consider themselves privileged to belong to the spiritual family of the Immaculate Mother, they shall strive zealously to fulfill all the duties of good daughters toward such a Mother."
- "As true handmaids of Mary, in all their thoughts, words and actions, they take this holy Mother as the model given them by God for their own conduct."
- "Penetrated by this love of Mary, they undertake nothing of importance without having implored her assistance."
- "They manifest their ardent love also by reciting her Office, by celebrating her feasts in a solemn manner, by saying daily, when at all possible, the Rosary and the Litany of Loretto."
- "The words of Mary, 'Whatsoever He will say to you, do ye' shall be the maxim of the Poor School Sisters."

It is not hard to find an echo of Fourier's sentiments expressed in these rules and he no doubt would have been pleased regarding the devotion of the "new Notre Dames."

One might have expected that after Vatican II, devotion to Mary might have decreased, but our Interim Constitutions of 1968 prove that such was not the case. The Mother of Jesus is mentioned often in the revised Rule, but there is found no “sterile and ephemeral sentimentality.” (Marialis Cultus, no. 38) Instead, Mary is the perfect model of every disciple of her Son, our Lord:

Mary, the patroness of the School Sisters, synthesizes the qualities of the Anawim in the life of responsible service and loving surrender to God and people. Like her, the School Sisters remain open to the Word, alert to the real needs of people, and accept their mission to “Take this Child and make Him grow” in whatever way and through whatever means God asks. The School Sisters are openly responsive to God’s plans for them, a sign of trust requiring the poverty of complete dependence on Him. Mary’s words at the marriage feast are an incentive to the School Sisters of Notre Dame to give full service of love: “No matter what He tells you, be sure you do it.”

(Paragraph 9 on “Spirit”)

The Interim Constitutions encourage every Sister to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, alert to the needs in God’s world today, and ready to do whatever He may ask us to do in order for the Word to become Incarnate in us and in the modern world. Sacred Scripture is seen as a primary source of Christian life and prayer and Mary is offered as exemplar because she herself heard the words and ‘tucked them away in her heart.’ “With Mary, the Mother of God, we ponder in our hearts the words received, knowing that ‘we hear His voice today.’” (Chapter on “Prayer”)

She is the one who truly lived the words found in the Letter to the Hebrews: “God, here I am. I am coming to obey your Will.” (10:7) Thus we see Mary, not unapproachable and on a pedestal, far beyond any relationship to the rest of us struggling Christians; rather, she is placed within the Church, as a woman of strong faith and loving service.

In our apostolate each School Sister of Notre Dame serves the Church in the spirit of Mary, who presented the Word of God to all men. We are alert in kindness and friendliness to needs and opportunities as Mary was at Cana. Strengthened by the Spirit we go to all in deep faith and high courage, in joyous union with her whom the Church has for centuries invoked as Queen of the Apostles.

(Section three of “Apostolate”)

This Interim Constitution was written in 1968. The words may have been different, but the spirit was the same as that shown when Peter Fourier and Alix le Clerc led their daughters to Our Lady in the 16th and 17th centuries. They

knew, as Mary herself knew, that her greatness was always relational, that she was worthy to be called blessed only because He “had looked with favor on His lowly servant.” Mother Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger must have been very aware of that fact too, as her letters testify. For example, on October 30, 1878, about six months before her death, Mother Theresa wrote to the Sisters at Altenbuch: “I know of nothing better than to recommend for your consideration the beautiful words of the Magnificat.... With Mary, the Blessed Virgin, praise the Lord who has deigned to accept you as His spouses forever... ask that He may look upon us in his grace...Let us acknowledge ourselves... as his poor handmaids and servants, unworthy to be regarded by him, but nevertheless, obliged to serve him faithfully all the days of our life.... Let us work faithfully and diligently in the Lord’s vineyard without being anxious as to what others are doing...” Was it just custom or routine that prompted her to write “J.M.” at the top of every letter? I believe she did it with thoughtfulness, fully aware of the relationship between Jesus and His Mother and their relationship to the School Sisters of Notre Dame. As St. Louis De Montfort points out to us so clearly: “The strongest inclination of Mary is to unite us to Jesus Christ, her Son.”⁹ In another place this Saint reminds us: “Jesus Christ our Saviour, true God and true Man, ought to be the last end of all our other devotions, else they are false and delusive.”¹⁰ How often De Monfort has been quoted out of context and his Marian Devotion is made to appear far from being Christocentric! And yet, he knew that when we say “Mary”, she says “Jesus.” It is interesting to note that De Montfort wrote at a time when the heresy of Jansenism, which opposed devotion to Mary, was flourishing throughout Europe. He lived in the years between the founding of the Daughters of Our Lady and the later founding of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. All these holy people, so far mentioned, knew through prayer what Pope Paul VI would express in the year 1974: “In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon him. It was with a view to Christ that God the Father from all eternity chose her to be the all-holy Mother and adorned her with gifts of the Spirit granted to no one else.” (Marialis Cultus, par. 25). When Mother Theresa of Jesus begins one of her prayers with “I greet you a thousand, thousand times, O Immaculate Virgin Mary,” one gets the first impression that she is carried away in her Marian Devotion, that she has forgotten that Mary is always relational. However, she continues her prayer with “through the wounded heart of Jesus, in the Holy Spirit....O Immaculate Virgin Mary, unite the hearts of our children in your heart, and present each individual to the most holy Trinity, that God may keep their hearts pure and chaste, that he may uproot from those hearts everything which might displease him.” (Prayer of February 7, 1865).

As might be expected, the Sisters’ devotion to Mary diffused to all who came within their circle of influence, especially to the children whom they educated, be they in Europe or in United States of America. The following

⁹ St. Louis Mary De Montfort, True Devotion To Mary, (Bay Shore: Montfort Publ., 1954) p. 54

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 42

excerpt shows that Marian Devotion did not stop on the east shore of the Atlantic Ocean:

December 8, 1854, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was declared an article of faith by the Sovereign pontiff, Pope Pius IX. As soon as the news reached America, the Sisters of Notre Dame and their pupils everywhere joined in the rejoicing and in thanksgiving to God for this new honor bestowed on our Mother and Queen. As all the sisters on the missions enjoyed the inestimable blessing of having the Blessed Sacrament in their chapels, celebrations in our blessed Lady's honor were joyfully held and continued for three days.¹¹

Let us now turn our attention to Marian Devotion as found in the "New Rule" of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, a Rule 'strangely' entitled You Are Sent and approved in 1970.

The very first reference to Mary occurs in the Introduction: "In a spirit of openness and fidelity, then, we stand with Mary, Mother of the Church and of our Congregation, welcoming her gentle challenge, 'Do what ever He tells you.' Two Scriptural allusions are obvious – "But standing by the cross of Jesus was his mother..." (Jn 19: 25) and "His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you' (Jn 2:5).¹²

We stand, symbolic of our readiness to hear and do whatever the Lord may request. Is this not the same fidelity the Church is called to? "The Church herself is a virgin, who keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse."¹³ Mary is seen as leading to Jesus, as she did at Cana: "Hence when she is being preached and venerated, she summons the faithful to her Son and His sacrifice, and to love for the Father."¹⁴ All the followers of Christ are challenged to be faithful, but they are also asked to "pray that the strength and the consolation of the Holy Spirit may descend copiously upon all those many Christians of whatsoever Church who endure suffering and deprivations for their unwavering loyalty to the name of Christ."¹⁵ Who could know better than Mary, standing by the cross, what it costs to be obedient and full of faith? There she united herself with a maternal heart to his sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this victim which she herself had brought forth and also was offering to the Eternal Father."¹⁶ Pope Paul VI sees the Cana command ("Do what ever He tells you") as harmonizing wonderfully with those [words] spoken by the Father at the theophany on Mount Tabor: 'Listen to Him' " (M.C., par. 57)

¹¹ A School Sister of Notre Dame, Mother Caroline and the School Sisters of Notre Dame in North America, Vol. I, (St. Louis: Woodward and Tiernan Co., 1928) , p. 92

¹² Revised Standard Version

¹³ Walter M. Abbott, S.J., Gen. Ed., The Documents of Vatican II, (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p. 93

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 93

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 385

¹⁶ Marialis Cultus, par. 20. All future references will be M.C.

The next reference to Our Lady in You Are Sent is found in paragraph five and reads thus: “With Mary we listen in total availability, ready always to evaluate our decisions, and to do courageously whatever He tells us.” Many scriptural quotes come to mind in connection with this paragraph. At the time of the annunciation, Mary surely had to re-think all her plans for the future. Gabriel’s declaration tested her availability to the plan of the Lord, her faith that He would provide and her courage to do whatever He asked. We know her answer, an answer that has become the perfect response for everyone who seeks to obey: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord: let it be to me according to your word.” (Lk 1: 38) Did it not take courage for this woman of faith to continue to walk in God’s ways after Simeon plainly warned her that “a sword will pierce through your own soul also?” (Lk 2: 35) And what about the beautiful compliment to her: “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked” – a compliment that met with: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Lk 11: 27-28) We give Mary little credit when we proclaim that she knew it all, that she was omniscient as far as God’s plan for her and Jesus was concerned. Surely, she, like every other human being, had to “listen”, “evaluate” and “do.” Mary had been given the highest honor of all; she knew that her motherhood of Jesus made her “blessed.” she knew that the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and made her a Temple of God’s Son. And still, Jesus could sound as if he was denying her motherhood when he replied: “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And He added: “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister and mother.” (Mk 3:33-35) Is it fair to Mary to say that she felt no emotion on hearing Jesus say that, that she understood perfectly that He was extolling her obedience rather than her physical motherhood? I personally believe that Mary had to exercise faith at that moment, that her faith was her response to that Revelation – a response that took place on every level of her personality. She was totally committed to God’s will, but that will unfolded gradually and slowly for her as it did for her divine Son. If Mariology tells us who WE are, then we have got to have something in common with the Virgin Mary. How else could we call her ‘Mother’ and mean it? How could we struggling humans, in this “vale of tears” ever feel close to an “isolated statue”? Not every human being can “mother” the Son of God-made-man; nevertheless, there is no one who cannot hear the word of God in some way, and keep it, thus doing the will of the Father, faith-fully. Mary was a real woman and worthy of more than mere sentimental piety. The Council Fathers reminded us so beautifully regarding true devotion:

Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in a certain vain credulity. Rather, it proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues.

(Abbott, p. 95)

The School Sisters of Notre Dame are within the Church of Christ, members of His Mystical Body, and as such, we would expect that she mirrors what is happening in the rest of the Church. Paragraph Five asks of the Sisters no more than the Council Fathers ask of all the faithful, no more than Pope Paul VI asks of the whole People of God when he writes:

Mary is the attentive Virgin, who receives the word of God with faith, that faith which in her case was the gateway and path to divine Motherhood....The Church also acts in this way, especially in the liturgy, when with faith she listens, accepts, proclaims and venerates the word of God, distributes it to the faithful as the bread of life and in the light of that word examines the signs of the times and interprets and lives the events of history.

(M.C., par. 17)

Finally, insofar as it may be necessary we would like to repeat that the ultimate purpose of devotion to the Blessed Virgin is to glorify God and to lead Christians to commit themselves to a life which is in absolute conformity with his will.

(M.C., par. 30)

The third Marian quote in You Are Sent just elaborates on what has already been stated: "In her spirit [our Foundress] we respond to divine providence as expressed in the signs of our times, remembering that with the help of Our Lady we can and will do whatever He tells us." (par 14) Once again Mary's command at Cana is used as model for all School Sisters, across the world. A Christian knows and believes that God provides, that all the world can be a sacrament. A Christian looks carefully and prayerfully at what is happening in the world, and trusts that the Lord of History knows what He is about. A Christian knows that the signs of the times call him/her to do something positive to upbuild the Kingdom of Christ on earth. We ask the help of Our Lady because we know that she too had to "ponder in her heart" what was happening around her. (Lk 2:19; Lk 2: 50) We remember that she "stood by the cross of Jesus" (Jn 19:15) ready to do the Father's will even if she did not understand it. "There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, suffering grievously with her only-begotten Son." (Abbot, p. 89)

Christ is Mediator, but "the Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary. She experiences it continuously and commends it to the hearts of the faithful, so that encouraged by this maternal help they may more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer." (Abbott, p. 92) The Church tells us to call upon Mary for her aid "because she heard the word of God and acted on it and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions." (M.C., par. 35) How clearly Pope Paul VI puts it:

...The Blessed Virgin Mary offers a calm vision and a reassuring word to modern man, torn as he often is between anguish and hope, defeated by the sense of his own limitations and assailed by limitless aspirations, troubled in his mind and divided in his heart, uncertain before the riddle of death, oppressed by loneliness while yearning for fellowship, a prey to boredom and disgust. (M.C. par. 57)

In our Constitutions' section on 'Prayer', the following quote is inserted: "With Mary, we ponder in our hearts the Word received, ready to make prayer fruitful in the fulfillment of our mission." (par.19) "We ponder in our hearts," words taken directly from the Gospel of St. Luke: 2:19 and 2:51. Prayer must be fruitful in good works. Our religion, our binding to God, must be more than words, more than just lip-service. Jesus leaves no doubt about it when He says: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father who is in heaven," Matt 7: 21 and also "You are my friends if you do what I command you." (Jn 15: 14) St. James has advice along the same lines: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." (1: 22) The Word of God is not given to us so that we might possess it and hold it to ourselves – it is more like love, for it is meant to be given away to others. If the Father had not loved us so much that He sent us His only Son, where would we be today? If Mary had held Jesus to her bosom and not let Him be free to do His Father's business, where would we be today? Mary... "Embracing God's will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son." (Abbott, p. 88) Are we called to do less? "In an utterly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls." (Abbott, p. 91) Is she beyond our imitation? The Council Fathers do not seem to think so, for they tell us: "The Virgin Mary in her own life lived an example of that maternal love by which all should be fittingly animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission of the Church on behalf of the rebirth of men." (Abbott, p. 93) Once more we see Mary as model for all the Church because "in her the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption, and joyfully contemplates as in a faultless model that which she herself wholly desires and hopes to be." (Abbott, p. 16) We wonder if "faultless" means "sinless" or "immaculate" or "flawless" or "super-human:" our understanding of that one word could very well determine our devotion to the Mother of Jesus. And our devotion might make a difference to all our worship and manner of Christian life, as Pope Paul VI brings to our attention: "The faithful at a very early date began to look to Mary and to imitate her in making their lives an act of worship of God and making their worship a commitment of their lives." (M.C., par. 21) "The figure of the Blessed Virgin does not disillusion any of the profound expectations of the men and women of our time but offers them the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord..." (M.C., par. 37)

In You Are Sent there are two sections: the actual Constitutions themselves (13 pages) and the Directory (54 pages). The Marian quotes so far commented on are from the first section. Let us now look at the two references which can be found in the Directory.

The first one is: “As School Sisters of Notre Dame we respond to the Spirit with Mary and share in her life-giving role of making the Word incarnate. Daily as Church we honor Mary in the Marian Anthem, praying for perseverance, for the development of the spirit of our Congregation, and for vocations.” (p. 48-49) Here our belief in the Virginal Motherhood is expressed; its Scriptural backing is found in Luke 2: 7: “And she gave birth to her first-born Son” and in Matt 1: 25: “but he knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.” Such a life-giving role may appear to be absurd and out of the question because Jesus is already born once and that event is over with and complete. What then does this directive mean? How can all of us make the Word incarnate? I remember a priest once saying: “You may be the only Bible that some people read.” Vatican II asks us to pray “that through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles, the nations may be led to the knowledge of the truth as soon as possible, and that the splendor of God which brightens the fact of Jesus Christ may shine upon all men through the Holy Spirit.” (Abbott, p 630) By the way, that last quote comes from the end of the document on the ‘Missionary Activity of the Church.’ Another way in which we share in Mary’s life-giving role is our participation in the Liturgy. “In this way the faithful, living in the liturgy of the spirit of Advent, by thinking about the inexpressible love with which the Virgin Mother awaited her Son, are invited to take her as a model and to prepare themselves to meet the Savior who is to come.” (M.C., par. 4) This directive also brings to mind the concept of ‘Incarnational Spirituality’: “We take into ourselves the whole Christ in the Eucharist and extend Him into all life. We dialogue with God while we dialogue with persons, and recognize Him in events and circumstances of every day.” (Riccardo Lombardi, S.J., quoted in You Are Sent, p. 157.) Our faith tells us that if we are truly open to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, our lives and our actions will contribute to the upbuilding of Christ’s Body, the Church. The Head lives in the members and whatever is done for the least is done for Him. (Matt 25: 45) We, as the People of God, share in Mary’s life-giving role by singing out His goodness with our lives.

Regarding the practice of consecrated celibacy, the School Sister is assured that “she is especially fortified in this faithfulness by constant growth in love for Christ as person through...devotion to the Mother of the Lord.” (p. 63) After all, did not Gabriel’s greeting: “Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” (Lk 1: 28) mean that Mary was full of God’s grace, that she was sinless? And did not John represent all of us when Jesus gave

Mary to him as Mother? (Jn 19:27) Will not the Immaculate Mother help her daughters to remain faithful in their promises to the Lord? We know that Mary prayed with the believers in the Early Church (Act 1: 14) so we can be quite sure that she has our interests at heart still. It must be her delight to help us love her Son, the Son “who did not diminish His mother’s virginal integrity but sanctified it.” (Abbot, p. 89) We followers of Christ, still on this earth and striving to increase in holiness by conquering sin, raise our eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community.” (Abbott, p. 93) She is our patroness, our Mother, our intercessor. Once again, You Are Sent anticipated Marialis Cultus which states: “Mary is above all the example of that worship that consists in making one’s life an offering to God.” (par.21) “Behold the handmaid of the Lord;” (Lk 1:38) what a marvelous attitude for any follower of Jesus and daughter of Mary to develop and keep in her heart!

Now that we have carefully considered Marian Devotion in S.S.N.D. in the past and in the present, let us conclude by predicting what that devotion will consist of in the future.

It is often said that history repeats itself, that it is more cyclic than linear. If that statement is true, then the future devotion will be very much like what has gone on before: School Sisters will honor the Mary we find in the New Testament – a woman of strong faith who herself does all that He tells her. It will continue to be the devotion practiced by and passed on by Peter Fourier, Alix le Clerc, Mother Theresa Gerhardinger and “the living community through which has flowed the living spirit, often with difficulty, and which makes the Congregation what it is today, enriched by the past, challenged by the future.” (You Are Sent, Introduction)

On the other hand, if history is more linear than cyclic, then we can hope for a devotion that keeps deepening and broadening in scope as our understanding of Mary’s role in the Church’s life becomes clearer. Since Mary is Mother of the Church and of our Congregation, S.S.N.Ds will be concerned more with the Universal Church and its needs than with local or provincial concerns. S.S.N.D. will ask: What can we do to make Christ Incarnate today, even if it involves a death or an amputation in our community-body? More and more, Marian Devotion will be incorporated into the liturgical life of the church, rather than being isolated or insulated. Like their patroness Mary, the S.S.N.D.s will go “with haste” to the hill countries of Latin America, Africa and maybe even China and Russia where the sun also shines and the rain also falls. In other words, the devotion will consist more in apostolic action inspired by Mary than in “just” saying the Rosary, Angelus, Litany and Anthems. Our prayer will be that of Pope Paul, expressed less than a year ago. “On the morning of Pentecost she watched over with her prayer the beginning of evangelization prompted by the Holy Spirit: may she be the Star of the

evangelization ever renewed which the Church, docile to her Lord's command, must promote and accomplish, especially in these times which are difficult but full of hope!" (Evangeli Nuntiandi' of Pope Paul VI, December 8, 1975). And if our Marian Devotion is going to plunge us into the depths of the Church's call for evangelization, then there is going to be risk involved, poverty of spirit and a challenge that may be far from being the 'gentle' challenge that You Are Sent mentions in its Introduction. We may well be called upon to cooperate with the Lord of History in the kind of actions extolled by Mary in her Magnificat; (Lk 1:46-55) however, the Lord has much fashioning to do on us first before He can use us in such a noble service. Our 1970 Constitution has many similarities with Our Lady's Song of Praise, the Magnificat but we, like the church and unlike Mary, are in the 'already-but-not-yet' state where holiness and sinfulness co-exist.

- "My soul magnifies the Lord" - - -
"Individually and corporately we are committed to Christ, to community, to the kind of love and service which will build up His body, the Church" (par. 3)
- "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" - - -
"From the moment of our baptism we are open in a new way to the initiative of God in our lives (par. 2).
- "For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" - - -
"At a specific moment in our lives we respond in a new way to the mystery of God's continuing call, accepting the grace of total' consecration in an ecclesial community" (par. 2)
- "For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" - - -
"Our foremost apostolate, of course, is community life, a prophetic sign of the Church, of the living Christ" (par. 12).
- "For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
- And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation" - - -
"We cling to nothing but the Lord, content with what we receive, set free from selfish desires to possess, willing to suffer want, if need be" (par. 5).
- "He has shown strength with his arm" - - -
"We pray more and more that we may be forgiven, that we may change, that we may begin again, content to trust the Lord who says, 'My power is at its best in weakness' " (par. 21).

- “He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts” - - -
“Christian conversion requires new thinking and new living, a continual change of mind and heart” (page 45).
- “He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree” - - -
“Speaking the truth in love calls for authentic dialogue in which each Sister in the community humbly listens to the opinions of others and courageously contributes her own insights and ideas” (p. 55).
- “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away” - - -
“We are strong in the conviction that living genuinely according to Gospel poverty has sign value to the reality of Christ...The authentic spirit of the beatitudes, an aspect of poverty, prompts us to be like Christ in His freedom from condescension and prejudice.” (p. 69).
- “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever” - - -
- “Daily we go forth with courage, recalling the words of Mother Theresa, ‘Dear Sisters, we began this work of God with supernatural faith and confidence.... Let us continue to serve the Triune God with joy, to obey Him, to love Him above all things’ – GO, YOU ARE SENT TO MAKE ONE.” (par. 23)

May the Holy Spirit melt us, mold us and fill us, so that the Father may use us to bring about a new order in the new creation already begun by Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary!

Holy Mary, Mother of God, Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

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